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ABSTRACT

Seeking to understand the influence of gender on advisement relationships, 22 women doctoral recipients in education were interviewed using retrospective, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (audiotaped and transcribed verbatim), with the constant comparative method. Purposeful sampling adjustments and inclusion of relationships with all members of the subjects' committees produced a final sample of 52 male advisors and 15 female advisors for the 22 doctoral recipients. Analysis was done for patterns and themes which gave a comprehensive description of the subjects' advisement relationships. Findings indicated that: (1) mentoring relationships wer rare: 8 of the 52 male advisors and 2 of the 15 female advisors were considered mentors; and (2) women who had mentoring advisement relationships felt professionally affirmed and were more productive after graduation. Descriptions of advisory behavior fit the three categories of traditional gender role socialization: masculine, feminine, androgynous. Those advisors who were androgynous in behavior were able to balance task and interpersonal approaches to the advisee's work for an effective mentoring relationship. Implications suggest that androgynous type advisors are gender sensitive, that such advisors can effectively transcend the restrictions of traditional gender socialization, and that advisees could be taught to identify these gender based traits in order to more effectively select the best advisor for themselves. Includes 11 references. (JB)

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Toward Gender Sensitive Advisement of Women Doctoral Students

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According to the Chronicle of Higher Education the number of women graduating from doctoral programs in education has exceeded the number of men since 1983. So if you are entering a doctoral program in education in 1991, you will find the number of women in your class exceeds the number of men. Paradoxically, you are likely find a preponderance of male professors and a smaller number of female professors to choose from as doctoral advisors. Given the relatively smaller numbers and lower ranks of female professors on most doctoral faculties of education, a woman doctoral student is still more likely to choose male professors as doctoral advisors.

Although the doctoral advisement relationship is regarded by experts as the cornerstone of doctoral education, surprisingly little is known about women doctoral students' experiences and even less is known about women's experiences as doctoral advisees (Andersen, 1986; Carter, 1983; Jenkins, 1985). What are the implications for the advisement relationship when an advisor is male or female and an advisee is a woman? This paper reviews the relevant findings and educational implications of a phenomenological study unique in exploring how gender influences women doctoral students' perceptions of advisement relationships.

In order to better understand the influence of gender on advisement relationships, I asked 22 women doctoral recipients in education to describe the task and interpersonal dimensions of their advisement relationships with male and female advisors. Although women have been involved in higher education for the last 150 years and in spite of significant strides over the last 30 years, the academy remains a patriarchal system in which male professors are accorded power and both female professors and female students are oppressed groups (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Keller & Moglen, 1987; Simeone, 1987). Since gender and power issues are inextricably connected in higher education, I was particularly

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interested in how power issues played out in women's doctoral advisement relationships.

Qualitative methods were used for collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing the data to obtain and describe women doctoral recipients' perceptions of their relationships with male and female advisors. I conducted retrospective, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 22 women who received doctoral degrees in education in the years 1985 and 1986 from one east coast, land-grant, state university. The participants were Caucasian, middle-class married women with children, who lived in suburban towns, and were employed full-time during doctoral study. They described relationships with male advisors who were usually between 45-55 and full professors and female advisors who were usually between 35-45 and assistant or associate professors. Purposeful sampling adjustments and exploring relationships with all committee members increased the final sample size to 22 women with a total of 52 male advisors and 15 female advisors represented.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The constant comparative method was used in collecting the data. Content analysis was used to analyze patterns and themes that emerged from the data to give a comprehensive description of these women's advisement relationships.

The findings of this study replicated findings from earlier mentoring research that: 1) mentoring relationships were rare and precious--only 8 of the 52 male advisors and 2 of the 15 female advisors represented were considered mentors; and 2) women who had mentoring advisement relationships felt professionally affirmed and were more productive after graduation.

To view advisement relationships through the lens of gender was to take a different perspective that guided the analysis of data in new directions. Since they described both male and female advisors as mentors, these women distinguished effective from ineffective advisors on the basis of advisory behavior rather than gender. Their descriptions of advisory behavior fit the three categories of traditional gender role socialization--masculine, feminine or androgynous. Advisors with traditionally masculine or

feminine approaches to advisement were regarded as ineffective advisors, while those advisors who were androgynous in their approach were called mentors. These three "approaches to advisement" will be described briefly in terms of how task and interpersonal dimensions were balanced, and how power issues and sexual attraction were dealt with in each type of advisement relationship.

Table 1. Types of advisors grouped according to their approaches to advisement, emphasis on interpersonal and task dimensions, power issues and sexual attraction.

Approach to Advisement	Task vs. Interpersonal	Power Issues	Sexual Attraction
Masculine	Task	Uses for self	Distances advisee
Feminine	Interpersonal	Disowns power	Not an issue
Androgynous	Balanced	Uses in interest of advisee	Transforms Into caring friendship

Male and female advisors whose behavior reflected a traditionally masculine approach to advisement were strictly task-oriented and handled conflict by direct confrontation. Issues of power and sexuality were often intertwined in these women's descriptions of their interactions with male advisors. Women advisees reported feeling distanced with male advisors with a masculine approach to advisement because of advisory use of intimidation, shaming, treating advisees as sex objects, or overly intellectualized approaches that left advisees feeling objectified (Heinrich, in press). In contrast, advisors with a traditionally feminine approach to advisement overly emphasized the interpersonal dimension to the detriment of the task and avoided conflict with women advisees and associate advisor at all cost.

Since male advisors of this type eschewed their power, none were regarded as sexually attractive by women advisees. Women doctoral students in this study reported feeling "trapped" in restrictive roles with advisors with either traditionally masculine or feminine approaches to advisement (Heinrich, in press). Kanter (1977) referred to a similar phenomena for "token" women in business as "role encapsulation"; while Pope (1989) spoke of "frozen roles" between psychology doctoral students and advisor/supervisors.

Only male and female advisors with an androgynous approach to advisement were described as mentors. According to their advisees, they advised in gender sensitive ways that optimally balanced the task and interpersonal dimensions and used their legitimate power in the interest of the advisee. More specifically, they recognized the differential in advisor and advisee power, encouraged advisees to own their personal power, used their legitimate advisory power to protect and defend advisees from intrusive associate advisors or in the bureacratic university system, supported and challenged advisees at appropriate times, and in general, promoted the growth of advisees from initial parent-child to adult-adult, colleagial relationships. Women advisees described their relationships with mentoring advisors as interactions between two human beings unconstrained by roles dictated by gender role stereotypes.

When sexual attraction was present, mentoring male advisors were able to transform it into caring friendships with women advisees. This was the first time a study of academic advisement relationships reported women doctoral students' responses to the question, "Was sexual attraction ever an issue for you in your relationship with your advisor?" The 6 women who had been part of advisement teams that successfully negotiatied the sexual dynamic were able to explain how they had handled sexual attraction constructively in their relationships with mentoring advisors. They described a special type of intimacy that allowed both advisee and advisor to be creative. According to these women three ways to deal effectively with sexual attraction were: 1) being unafraid of the sexual dynamic facilitated working out a relationship in which

sexual attraction was translated into friendliness, consideration, openness, sensitivity, and nurturing; 2) letting go of preconceived notions of male/female sex role stereotypes "freed" advisor and advisor to interact as two caring human beings; and 3) decreasing the possibility of misinterpretation by speaking freely about their personal lives and significant relationships and by actually meeing each other's partners. In these advisement relationships sexual attraction was transformed into sexual energy and the interpersonal dimension was characterized by the warmth, empathy and caring characteristic of any deep friendship. Working through sexual attraction seemed to allow both advisors and advisees to enjoy the sexual energy between them and to use it to fuel the task of completing the doctoral degree. Consistent with findings of earlier studies (Misserian, 1981; Pope et al. 1979), all 22 women in this sample believed that actual sexual intimacy would be detrimental to the working relationship between a male advisor and woman advisee.

A number of implications emerged by bringing gender to front stage and two will be identified here. First, androgynous mentors are gender sensitive advisors who affirm women doctoral advisees personally and professionally. Gender-sensitive advisors and advisees in this study were able to overcome the constricting effects of traditional gender role socialization to establish caring relationships with one another. Secondly, since traits of gender sensitive advisement have been identified in the literature (O'Neil & Wrightsman, in press) and supported by the findings of this preliminary study, these traits can be taught to prospective advisees. Characteristics of both ineffective and mentoring advisor-advisee relationships could be described so advisees learn to use their observations of professors' behavior to discriminate mentoring advisement relationships, in which they feel affirmed and supported, from destructive advisement relationships, in which they feel encapsulated into restrictive roles. If informed women doctoral students choose advisors on the basis of their ability to handle power and sexual attraction in gender-sensitive ways, academic mentoring could become the norm rather than the exception.

Conclusion

From the findings, it is clear that gender sensitive, androgynous mentoring relationships were transformative forces in these women doctoral students' personal and professional lives. In order to deepen understanding of the dynamics of cross-gender and same-gender advisement relationships, the recommendations for further study include: enlarging samples to include male and female advisors and male advisees, extending the sample beyond one school of education to a variety of graduate schools, conducting longitudinal studies that begin at time of entry and continue after graduation, and using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques to study the complex phenomena of gender in academic advisement and mentoring at the doctoral level. It is my hope that knowledge gained from such research will translate into gender sensitive advisement for women doctoral students.

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